

THE CLEVELAND
MUSEUM OF ART
11150 EAST
BOULEVARD
CLEVELAND, OHIO
44106-1797



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Contact: Denise Horstman

ANSEL ADAMS: THE EARLY YEARS
October 6 - December 5, 1993

Ansel Adams: The Early Years, at The Cleveland Museum of Art from October 6 through December 5, 1993, examines the genesis of the long career of America's most beloved and influential photographer. Remembered most for heroic vistas of the American wilderness, Adams is revealed in these seventy-seven rare works--primarily from the 1920s and 1930s--to have possessed an artistic vision stimulated by the human figure, architectural forms, and close-ups of natural and manmade subjects, as well as by his early impressions of the Western panorama.

Tickets for this show *also* admit visitors to the concurrent exhibition, **Degas to Matisse: The Maurice Wertheim Collection from the Harvard University Art Museums**. *One* audio tour, narrated by the Museum's new director, Robert P. Bergman, is available for both shows. (See enclosed releases for more information about ticketing, important telephone numbers, special events, and exhibition catalogues and other merchandise offered to complement both exhibitions.)

Tom E. Hinson, the Cleveland Museum's curator of contemporary art, remarks:

One seldom gets to see early vintage images by Ansel Adams, whose historical importance and continuing impact on photography cannot be overstated. He had a singular vision for composing images in the camera. In turn, his exceptional darkroom skills allowed the emotions brought out by the subject matter to be conveyed in the finished print. An advocate of photography as fine art and of the unspoiled American frontier, Adams created works which are in stark contrast to those of some of his successors, who often record the imprint we make on our landscape. This difference in motif and philosophical approach can be observed in the upcoming exhibition **Between Home and Heaven: Contemporary American Landscape Photography** (on view from February 2 to April 3).

Ansel Adams (1902-84) credited his lifelong disciplined craftsmanship to his years of training to be a concert pianist--a promising career he forsook for photography. *Wind* (1919), taken in Yosemite National Park, exemplifies his early painterly, or Pictorialist, work; its overall soft focus is enhanced by the warm tones of the richly textured printing paper, which he frequently used prior to 1930. Adams' first portfolio, Parmelian Prints of the High Sierras (1927), contained several photographs taken in Yosemite, including *Monolith, The Face of Half Dome*. According to the artist, this was his first "visualization"--seeing clearly in his mind's eye his finished photograph while viewing his subject--an essential element of the photography theory and practice he later taught and wrote about with great conviction and distinction.

Borrowing an analogy from his music background, Adams considered the negative his "score" and the print, his "performance." As with other favorite negatives, Adams continued to print *Monolith, The Face of Half Dome* throughout his career. A vintage 1927 print and a monumental enlargement made in the 1950s are in this exhibition. (A 1980 version is in a complementary show of Adams' photographs from the Cleveland Museum collection, on view October 15, 1993, through January 9, 1994; see the enclosed press release.)

These milestones marked the 1930s. A pivotal visit with innovative contemporary photographer Paul Strand clinched Adams' vocation. He had his first important one-man shows, wrote journal articles and reviews, accepted commercial assignments, published his earliest collaborations with writers, and launched a series of technical books on photography. In 1932, Adams, Edward Weston, Imogen Cunningham, and other California-based photographers founded "Group f/64," naming themselves for the tiny lens aperture used to achieve sharp-focus details from foreground to distance, and advocating "straight" photography in reaction against the still-prevailing Pictorialist school. *Minerva from Sutro Gardens* captures the visual ideals of the new work, and was exhibited in a Group f/64 show at Adams' newly opened San Francisco gallery in 1933. Adams

made his portrait of Weston's second wife, *Charis Weston* (1938)--showing her bundled in layers of protection against High Sierra mosquitoes--while serving as the couple's guide through Yosemite.

The years leading to World War II culminated with Adams' role in establishing the Department of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1940 and the beginning of his most prolific decade of photography. By 1942, he codified his "Zone System" of measuring available light to maximize the tonal range of film from richest black to whitest white. He created panoramic landscapes, such as *Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico* (1941), for which he would become best known. Their formalist concern with line and tone, and their romantic subject matter, are clearly rooted in his early work.

Ansel Adams: The Early Years is one of a series of exhibitions of master photographers organized by the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), Boston, from the extraordinary holdings of photographs and paintings in the William H. Lane Collection. Massachusetts native Bill Lane coupled a successful business career in plastics manufacturing with lifelong service to the visual and performing arts. He began collecting American art in 1951, championing such pioneer modernists as Sheeler, Dove, O'Keeffe, Hartley, Davis, and Marin, and actively collected photographs beginning in the 1960s. The Lane Collection was the sole lender of photographs to the MFA's recent exhibition **Weston's Westons: Portraits and Nudes** and to its 1987 Sheeler retrospective. **Ansel Adams: The Early Years** opened at the MFA in 1991; after Cleveland, it will travel to the High Museum at Georgia Pacific Center, Atlanta (January 6 - March 18, 1994).

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